

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

October 25, 2019

Commissioner Andrew Saul
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Dear Commissioner Saul,

I write to express my concern regarding the proposed closure of the Social Security Administration's office in Decorah, Iowa. I not only ask that you provide additional information on the circumstances surrounding the closure but urge you to consider ways to ensure that the in-person services provided at this field office remain available in Northeast Iowa.

The Decorah office serves Social Security beneficiaries from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, including several counties in the congressional district that I represent. Seniors, people with disabilities, and their families from across the region rely on staff at the local field office to help them make important decisions about their benefits. Many choose to travel up to 5 hours to meet face-to-face with SSA staff rather than file a claim or submit an appeal online. When exploring eligibility for disability benefits or learning how the death of your spouse may impact your retirement, these are the critical and often difficult conversations that beneficiaries want—and sometimes need—to have face-to-face with trained and experienced representative.

It is my understanding that the SSA is currently exploring replacing the Decorah field office with a tele- or video-conferencing service line; under this model, a free-standing, unmanned kiosk would become beneficiaries' main point of access to SSA staff. While making certain services available remotely can help improve access, it is no substitute for the resources and expertise available at the Decorah field office. I worry that this model could have disastrous effects on local beneficiaries. With this in mind, I want to know what steps the SSA is taking to protect access to in-person services in the region.

Specifically, I request the following information:

- First and foremost, I ask that you confirm the agency's intent to close the field office and replace in-person services with a means of virtual communication. Has the SSA decided to close this field office?
- If no decision has been finalized regarding the field office, is its closure currently under consideration by the agency?
- I understand that Linda Kerr-Davis, the Regional Commissioner for the Social Security Kansas region and Gerald Nelson, the District Manager for the Waterloo District Office, informed Mayor Lorraine Borowski during a meeting on August 15, 2019 that the field

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office may close. Has the SSA otherwise communicated this information to the public?
Has the agency sought feedback regarding the decision?

- What circumstances led the agency to decide to or otherwise consider discontinuing in-person services at the Decorah Field Office?
- Describe the decision-making process employed by the agency to determine field office relocations, closures, changes in office hours, and modifications that may otherwise curtail the availability of in-person services in a region.
- Considering the community's interest in keeping the field office open, how does the SSA plan to continue providing in-person services at the Decorah Field Office?

Social Security is a promise to the American people and part of that means ensuring that these critical services remain available to those who need them. Thank you for your time and consideration of my concerns. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress